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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PARTY FOR JUSTICE AND
DEVELOPMENT LEADER

REF: A. RABAT 461
[1](#)B. RABAT 48

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy Lenderking for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Introduction: The Ambassador met April 3 for an hour and a half with Islamist-referenced Party for Justice and Development (PJD) Secretary General (SYG) Saad Eddine Othmani at PJD party headquarters. The Ambassador was accompanied by Poloff while Othmani was joined by PJD Deputy SYG and Party Caucus Leader Abdallah Baha. This is the first in a round of calls the Ambassador is making on political party leaders to discuss party proposals for a Western Sahara autonomy plan, the impact of the recently passed political party law, and party plans for the 2007 legislative elections. Othmani described the PJD's autonomy plan, the most detailed information we have seen so far from a Moroccan political party, as a further decentralization of government powers, with special prerogatives and resources given to the Western Sahara. Any autonomy plan should be implemented immediately as waiting to reach agreement with Algeria will take too long. The campaign season for the 2007 legislative elections is underway and as a result Othmani is launching visits to Europe, the US and Canada to meet with Moroccans resident abroad who for the first time will have the right to vote in these elections. The effects of the new political party law will be primarily "practical," reflected in such areas as financial transparency, and will hopefully make parties more credible and effective. Othmani and Baha discussed the recent PJD conference on US-Moroccan relations (septel), stressing the need for continued dialogue and improved cooperation with the US. They concluded the meeting by stressing their concerns on US foreign policy in the Arab/Islamic world and with a request for better US understanding of Muslim views in the region. End summary and introduction.

Moving to Autonomy Implementation Only Solution

[1](#)2. (C) In response to Ambassador's query, Othmani explained his belief that there can be no resolution to the Western Sahara issue if Algeria is not involved. The new Polisario faction, La Ligne des Martyrs, is now even accusing the Polisario of not wanting to find a solution. In the meantime, humanitarian conditions in the camps are terrible despite the fact that Algeria is a rich country. According to Othmani, the situation between Morocco and Algeria is unique in that they are the only two countries in the world which host each other's diplomats but yet continue to have a

closed border. The only explanation is that Algeria wants to continue to pressure Morocco. According to Baha, the minority of "Moroccan nationals" involuntarily sequestered in Tindouf should not hold up the future of the majority of the Sahrawis who live in the Sahara. If these people were given a choice, they would choose to return, said Baha. In the meantime, the fate of the majority should not be held hostage.

13. (C) Consequently, Othmani explained, the only possible solution is for Morocco to move directly to implementing autonomy without waiting for an agreement with Algeria which could take at least ten to fifteen years. Currently, the regionalization plans being adopted are only a "facade," and the GOM needs to improve the governing of the regions by giving them new prerogatives and devolving new powers to them. Othmani said the party had submitted a memo to the palace regarding the PJD's ideas on autonomy. Under this proposal, seven regions would have their own parliaments and elected officials, but there would continue to be a "sense of solidarity" between the regions. The "southern provinces," as Othmani referred to Western Sahara, would have expanded prerogatives and be given additional resources. The central government must continue to give subsidies to regions without resources. While the taxes would be collected by the state, revenue would be returned to the region depending on the needs of the region. In the PJD's proposal, the central government retains control over major infrastructure such as ports, airports, national autoroutes, and dams. Othmani emphasized that if autonomy is ever achieved, Morocco "will do everything possible to make it succeed."

14. (C) According to Othmani, consultations with Sahrawi leaders through the newly invigorated CORCAS are as important

as the King's initiative to consult with the political parties on autonomy. Baha noted that the PJD's autonomy plan had included a proposal to integrate all zones where Sahrawis reside to maintain a "homogeneity." In response to Ambassador's question, Baha explained that access between Mauritania and Morocco would not necessarily become easier because of the current visa requirement between the two countries and the fact that it is a very "sensitive" region. The US is only now becoming interested in it because of the possibility of terrorists exploiting it. Between Algeria and Morocco, however, people from both sides can easily cross the border for events such as weddings. As a result, the paths between the two countries are called the "route of unity," because the people are united on both sides of the borders, but the two governments cannot seem to agree.

2007 Legislative Elections: The Race is On

15. (C) Othmani noted that he would be leaving the following week on a visit to France, specifically for the purpose of engendering interest among resident Moroccans to vote in the upcoming legislative elections. Now that the King has announced that Moroccans overseas can vote, political parties are "obliged" to travel, as many overseas Moroccans do not have specific ties to any particular party. Unfortunately, according to Othmani, nor do these same Moroccans have much interest in politics. As a result, "the election campaign has begun," said Othmani. Referring to his upcoming visit to the US, Othmani noted that 25,000 Moroccans live in Boston, one of the cities he plans to visit.

16. (C) Sounding likely PJD campaign themes, Baha described how Morocco needs more democracy, transparency and justice "in order to advance." The biggest problem currently handicapping development, according to Baha, is corruption which dissuades international investment. Even in programs to eliminate poverty, people are taking money for themselves. The Ambassador explained that an important component of the Millennium Challenge Account, which potentially represents a major increase in US assistance to Morocco, is to track how this aid is utilized. It would be important to ensure that corruption does not occur in this process.

Implementation of New Party Law Key

17. (C) Othmani said that the PJD plans to hold its internal party congress to ensure conformity with the new political party law in July. Other parties should also be holding these extraordinary congresses, but thus far none have. These meetings will be purely internal matters and will not analyze political positions. Once these congresses are held, the result of the new law will be seen "in practice," in such areas as financial transparency and the percentage of women and youth involvement. Baha emphasized that if the new law is correctly applied, it will lead to great reform in the political field. The PJD is hopeful that this will result in parties becoming more credible and effective.

PJD Conference on US-Moroccan Relations

18. (C) Ambassador praised Othmani for the recent conference on US-Moroccan relations, noting that he understood that it had been an occasion for fruitful dialogue and discussion (septel). Othmani explained the purpose of the conference as two-fold: to improve Moroccan understanding of US decision-making so as to be better able to defend Moroccan interests in the US, and to train young PJD leaders from various regions in Morocco. Baha described his 2000 visit to the US, noting his surprise at Moroccan ignorance of America. "It was completely different from how I had envisioned it," said Baha. The fact that the US and its decision-making process was not always "rational," or monolithic is important for foreigners to understand. While we do not always agree with US foreign policy, many "rush to anti-Americanism" too quickly. However, many Americans also do not necessarily agree with these policies either, said Baha. For example, Baha said, Professor Louis Cantori could not have had a stronger position against the American administration's policies in Iraq. The fact that there are diverse views in the US needs to be better understood by others. Conferences such as these serve to enhance understanding and improve cooperation, and should be conducted more often, concluded Baha.

19. (C) Othmani noted that he has been heavily criticized for his upcoming visit to the US, charging that the "other political parties" want to be the only interlocutor with the Americans and the sole recipient of foreign assistance. According to Othmani, these parties do not want the PJD to be perceived as a "normal party," and would prefer that the PJD be marginalized. Fortunately, however, that is not occurring, said Othmani. The old parties were not happy with the competition presented by the PJD in the 2002 elections and are now "worried" about possible PJD gains in 2007. Baha explained that the other parties assumed that the PJD should be "totally anti-American," because of its "differences of opinions" on foreign policy issues. These differences are normal and should be discussed amongst friends. Upon his return from the US, Baha said he encouraged PJD members to visit the US to see for themselves the divergence of views which exists.

Views on US Foreign Policy

10. (C) The last half hour of the meeting was devoted to the PJD airing its position on US foreign policy, including on Iraq and the Palestinian elections. Baha warned that Iraq's "slide into civil war" would be a catastrophe for the entire region. He also noted that US reaction to the Palestinian elections could worsen anti-Americanism in the world and provide a fertile breeding ground for terrorists. This is dangerous both for the West and for Muslim countries alike. Othmani said that the US should pressure both Israel and Hamas to stop attacks. Despite a UN decision on the separation wall, Israel continues to build. Actions such as these create terrorists. It is our hope that the American administration can better understand the position of Muslims on these issues. Ambassador noted that Othmani will have the occasion on his upcoming visit to the US on a VOLVIS to share these views with a wide variety of American interlocutors. He emphasized that the PJD should also take into consideration the many positive activities the US is working

on, such as the MCA, to support Morocco in its reform process. The two pledged to be in contact following Othmani's visit to the US.

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